United Nations E/CN.6/2009/12

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 December 2008

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-third session
2-13 March 2009
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives

Discussion guide on the high-level round table on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS

Note by the Bureau of the Commission on the Status of Women

I. Background

1. In order to further develop opportunities for sharing national experience, in particular with regard to the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcome of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, the Commission on the Status of Women introduced the option of high-level round tables at its forty-sixth session in 2002 (decision 46/101). It authorized the Bureau to decide the number, timing and theme of any such round tables, subsequent to consultation with all interested Member States through regional groups.

2. At its fiftieth session, in March 2006, the Commission decided that the annual interactive high-level round table would focus on experiences, lessons learned and good practices, including results with supporting data, where available, in relation to the implementation of previous commitments made with regard to the priority theme.[1]

* E/CN.6/2009/1.

[1] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2006, Supplement No. 1* (E/2006/99), resolution 2006/9, para. 3.

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II. Organizational matters

Theme

3. At the fifty-third session of the Commission, the high-level round table will focus on the priority theme of "The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS".[2]

Participants

4. The high-level round table is an opportunity for high-level representatives from capitals attending the fifty-third session of the Commission to engage in dialogue, and share experiences, lessons learned and good practices. The high-level representatives may include: ministers of women's affairs; ministers of labour; ministers of social development; heads of national machineries for gender equality; heads of women's/gender equality commissions; and senior officials from other relevant bodies, including statistical offices.

5. The high-level round table will be open to other members of the Commission and observers. A number of invited senior officials from entities of the United Nations system and representatives of non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council will also have an opportunity to participate in the dialogue.

Timing and format

6. The high-level round table will be held at United Nations Headquarters in New York on 2 March 2009, from 3 to 6 p.m.

7. The high-level round table will be chaired by the Chairperson of the Commission, Olivier Belle (Belgium).

8. In order to promote the interactivity of the round table, the Chairperson will guide the discussions in a proactive manner. Interventions shall not exceed three minutes. Speakers are also encouraged to pose questions and offer comments on interventions made in the dialogue. Written statements are strongly discouraged.

9. The first half of the high-level round table should consist of a discussion among high-level representatives from capitals. During the second half, invited senior officials of the United Nations system and representatives of non-governmental organizations will participate.

Outcome

10. A Chairperson's summary of the high-level round table will be prepared.

[2] Ibid., para. 23 (c).

III. Elements for discussion in the high-level round table

A. Global policy and legal framework

11. Commitments on the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS have been made by Governments at the international level, including at the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), and the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (2000), as well as in the outcomes of sessions of the Commission on the Status of Women since 1996. International human rights treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, as well as International Labour Organization conventions recognize the obligations that State parties have to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men.

12. In 1994, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development[3] noted that the full participation and partnership of both women and men is required in productive and reproductive life, including shared responsibilities for the care and nurturing of children and maintenance of the household.[4] The Programme of Action noted that male responsibilities should be emphasized with respect to child-rearing and housework and that greater investments should be made in appropriate measures to lessen the daily burden of domestic responsibilities, the greatest share of which falls on women.[5] Countries were urged, inter alia, to enact laws and to implement programmes and policies which will enable employees of both sexes to organize their family and work responsibilities through flexible work-hours, parental leave, day-care facilities, maternity leave, policies that enable working mothers to breast-feed their children, and health insurance. The Programme of Action recommended that similar rights should be ensured to those working in the informal sector.[6] The equal participation of women and men in all areas of family and household responsibilities, including family planning, child-rearing and housework, should be promoted and encouraged by Governments.[7]

13. Commitments made by countries at the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, included the promotion of equal partnership between women and men in family and community life and society, the shared responsibility of men and women in the care of children and support for older family members; and men's shared responsibility and active involvement in responsible parenthood and sexual and reproductive behaviour. Governments committed to develop means of recognizing and making visible the full extent of the

[3] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publications, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[4] Ibid., para. 4.1.

[5] Ibid., para. 4.11.

[6] Ibid., para. 4.13.

[7] Ibid., para. 4.26.

work of women and their contributions to the national economy, including in the unremunerated and domestic sectors.[8]

14. The Beijing Declaration emphasized that the equal sharing of responsibilities and a harmonious partnership between women and men were critical to their well-being and that of their families as well as to the consolidation of democracy.[9] The Beijing Platform for Action noted that women bear a disproportionate burden because of the gender division of labour and household responsibilities. Girls and young women are expected to manage both educational and domestic responsibilities, often resulting in poor scholastic performance and early drop-out from the educational system. Lack of access to productive resources and inadequate sharing of family responsibilities, combined with a lack of or insufficient services such as childcare, continue to restrict employment, economic, professional and other opportunities and mobility for women; and the unequal division of labour and responsibilities within households limits women's potential to find time and to develop the skills required for participation in decision-making in wider public forums.[10]

15. The Platform noted that a more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men not only provides a better quality of life for women and their daughters but also enhances their opportunities to shape and design public policy, practice and expenditure so that their interests may be recognized and addressed.[11] The Platform called on Governments to ensure opportunities for women and men to take job-protected parental leave and to have parental benefits; and to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities for the family by men and women, including through appropriate legislation.[12]

16. The outcome document of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly also noted that failure to recognize and measure in quantitative terms unremunerated work of women, which is often not valued in national accounts, has meant that women's full contribution to social and economic development remains underestimated and undervalued. As long as there is insufficient sharing of tasks and responsibilities with men, the combination of remunerated work and caregiving will lead to the continued disproportionate burden for women in comparison to men.[13] Governments were called on to design, implement and promote family-friendly policies and services, including affordable, accessible and quality care services for children and other dependants, parental and other leave schemes and campaigns to sensitize public opinion and other relevant actors to equal sharing of employment and family responsibilities between women and men.[14]

17. Agreed conclusions 1996/3, on child and dependant care, including sharing of work and family responsibilities, adopted by the Commission at its fortieth session, in 1996, emphasized that greater participation of men in family responsibilities,

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[8] *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II, Commitment 5 (g) and (n).

[9] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex I, Beijing Declaration, para. 15.

[10] Ibid., annex II, paras. 50, 152 and 185.

[11] Ibid., para. 185.

[12] Ibid., para. 179 (c).

[13] General Assembly resolution S-23/3, annex, para. 47.

[14] Ibid., para. 82 (d).

including domestic work and child and dependant care, would contribute to the welfare of children, women and men themselves.[15]

18. Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women since 1996 have addressed the issue of the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men within the context of the consideration of other priority themes. The Commission's agreed conclusions on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, adopted at the forty-eighth session endorsed by the Economic and Social Council in 2004,[16] recognized that joint partnership between women and girls and men and boys was essential to achieving gender equality and called for the creation and improvement of training and education programmes to enhance awareness and knowledge among men and women on their roles as parents, legal guardians and caregivers and the importance of sharing family responsibilities.

19. The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women recognize the obligations that State parties have to promote the equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men. Article 5 (a) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in particular, notes the need for appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to eliminating prejudices and practices which are based on the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women. Article 18 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child calls on States parties to use their best efforts to ensure recognition of the principle that both parents have common responsibilities for the upbringing and development of the child. ILO Convention No. 156 (1981), and its corresponding resolution, addresses the situation of Workers with Family Responsibilities.

20. The HIV/AIDS pandemic brought greater urgency to addressing the division of labour between women and men, particularly with regard to caregiving. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized the consequences of HIV/AIDS for women's role as mothers and caregivers and their contribution to the economic support of their families.[17] Governments were called on to support and strengthen national capacity to create and improve gender-sensitive policies and programmes on HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, including the provision of resources and facilities to women who find themselves the principal caregivers or economic support for those infected with HIV/AIDS or affected by the pandemic, and the survivors, particularly children and older persons.[18]

21. The agreed conclusions on women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS, adopted by the Commission at its forty-fifth session, in 2001, which were endorsed by the Economic and Social Council,[19] encouraged the active involvement of men and

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[15] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1996, Supplement No. 6* (E/1996/26), chap. I, sect. C.

[16] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2004, Supplement No. 1* (E/2004/99), resolution 2004/11 on the agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality, paras. 3 and 6 (c).

[17] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women*, chap. I, resolution 1, annex II, para. 98.

[18] Ibid., para. 108 (g).

[19] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2001, Supplement No. 1* (E/2001/99), resolution 2001/5 on agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on thematic issues, sect. A.3, para. 2 (i).

boys through, inter alia, youth-led and youth-specific HIV education projects and peer-based programmes, in challenging gender stereotypes and attitudes as well as their full participation in prevention, impact alleviation and care. The agreed conclusions on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, adopted by the Commission at its fifty-first session, in 2007, urged Governments to take measures to increase men's responsibility for home-based care in order to address the disproportionate burden borne by women and girls in caring for the chronically ill.[20]

22. The resolution of the Commission on the Status of Women on "Women, the girl child and HIV/AIDS", adopted at its fifty-first session, in 2007, expressed concern that women and girls bear the disproportionate burden of caring for and supporting those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.[21]

B. Discussion guide

23. During the round table, high-level representatives from capitals are expected to focus on lessons learned, achievements and good practices, as well as gaps and challenges, with supporting data where available, with respect to implementation at the national level of commitments on the priority theme: "Equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS".

24. Participants may wish to consider the following issues, while keeping in mind the contributions of different stakeholders:

(a) Efforts to raise awareness of and challenge gender stereotypes which perpetuate perceptions of women as natural caregivers and men as the main breadwinners and/or deficient caregivers, including through interventions in the education system and the media and through awareness-raising campaigns;

(b) Policy and legislative interventions, and programmes and services developed to enable women and men to reconcile family and work responsibilities, such as gender-sensitive labour laws (including on leave policies and working time measures); public services (for example, child and elder care); and systems of financial support (such as allowances and pensions);

(c) Public policy interventions to improve availability and quality of social and physical infrastructure (such as education, health care, water, sanitation, energy and time-saving technologies) to reduce the current burden of unpaid work for women and to promote more equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men;

(d) Measures taken to support and strengthen the contributions of men and boys to domestic and care work, and to explore ways to overcome barriers to their involvement in equal sharing of responsibilities;

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[20] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 7* (E/2007/27), chap. I, sect. A, Agreed conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women on the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, para. 14.5 (e).

[21] Ibid., chap. I, sect. D, resolution 51/1, para. 3.

(e) Initiatives taken at the national level to provide care and support to people living with HIV, including improvements in public health systems and measures to support those providing home-based care;

(f) Strategies and measures developed to strengthen the role of men and boys in caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS;

(g) Efforts to measure and value unpaid work and measure the relative contributions of women and men at the household level, including through time-use surveys, collection of data and other measures, in order to develop policies to address the unequal sharing of responsibilities;

(h) Measures to make visible and strengthen the role and contributions of different stakeholders — including Government, the private sector, and civil society — in providing services to support households and families to manage work, family and caregiving responsibilities, including in the context of HIV/AIDS.